PANCHAYAT RAJ

BY

M. K. GANDHI

NAVAJIVAN PUBLISHING HOUSE
AHMEDABAD-14

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By
M. K. GANDHI

Compiled by
R. K. PRABHU

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This is a timely publication, for compiling which we heartily thank Shri R. K. Prabhu. The readers of Gandhiji's writings will have known him well enough through his earlier compilations like *India of My Dreams*, *Mohan-Mala*, *Truth is God*, *Evil Wrought by the English Medium*, etc. We propose to issue in the near future a further set of books compiled by him, containing, in brief, the essential teachings of Gandhiji on subjects of vital national concern, such as *Birth-Control: The Right Way and The Wrong Way*, *Non-violent Way to World Peace*, *The Message of the Gita*, *The Moral Basis of Vegetarianism*, and so on. We hope that students of Gandhian literature will welcome these publications.

Ever since Gandhiji returned to India in 1915 he had been laying the greatest emphasis on the need to revitalize the village Panchayats and establish Village Swaraj in this country, for he firmly believed that the real India lives in its seven hundred thousand and odd villages and that India has no future worth the name unless these villages play their proper part in the life of the country. His scheme of such a village Swaraj comprehendede very department of rural activity which went to make each village self-governing and self-contained as regards the essential needs of its inhabitants, so that on the solid foundation of a vast network of such little "republics" peacefully co-operating with one another for matual benefit, the life of the nation as a whole could be broadbased, enabling it to progress smoothly towards its destined goal. Village sanitation and hygiene,

village diet and health, medical relief, non-violent rural economy based on Khadi and other village industries, arts and crafts, co-operative cattle-farming and other co-operatives, basic education, and Shanti Sena, are some of the primary means by which, in Gandhiji's opinion, the goal of all-round village development can be attained. A village worker trained and disciplined for initiating and helping forward such a broadbased movement would be its pivot.

It is a matter for satisfaction that in several parts of the country rural reconstruction and development is progressing along the lines chalked out by Gandhiji, but more strenuous and sustained efforts are necessary on the part of both individual Sarvodaya workers and official and semi-official agencies, if the pace is to be accelerated. Under alien rule, such a movement obviously could not make any appreciable progress or gather any momentum. Things have basically changed now and our Planners are coming to realize more and more that if our national economy is to be stabilized, the primary pre-requisite is the rehabilitation of our rural economy on the non-violent lines which had obtained, as pointed out by Gandhiji, till the advent of British rule, and which lies at present in a shattered and desperate condition. The Prime Minister has rightly told us that three things are our basic requirements today, viz., 1. a village school imparting basic education; 2. a village Panchayat; and 3. a village co-operative. One may well add a fourth one, namely a village *Parishramalaya* or industrial home, where any villager should be able to find work for adequate wages and to get training in rural industries or crafts. These four may well constitute the new four-fold programme for realizing true Swaraj.

The present publication will, we hope, help the reader to know and profit by what Gandhiji had to say about this aspect of the vital problem of national reconstruction. Above all, let us note what he has stated in the first chapter of this work (pp. 4-5) :

> "I have not pictured a poverty-stricken India containing ignorant millions. I have pictured to myself an India continually progressing along the lines best suited to her genius. I do not, however, picture it as a third class or even a first class copy of the dying civilization of the West."

The book has been priced as cheap as possibly we can, and we propose to issue it in Hindi, Gujarati, etc., also.

31-1-1959

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PANCHAYAT RAJ

CHAPTER 1

WHY THE VILLAGE MOVEMENT?

Villagers have suffered long from neglect by those who have had the benefit of education. They have chosen the city life. The village movement is an attempt to establish healthy contact with the villages by inducing those who are fired with the spirit of service to settle in them and find self-expression in the service of villagers. ...Those who have settled in villages in the spirit of service are not dismayed by the difficulties facing them. They knew before they went that they would have to contend against many difficulties including even sullenness on the part of villagers. Only those, therefore, who have faith in themselves and in their mission will serve the villagers and influence their lives. A true life lived amongst the people is in itself an object-lesson that must produce its own effect upon immediate surroundings. The difficulty with the young man is, perhaps, that he has gone to the village merely to earn a living without the spirit of service behind it. I admit that village life does not offer attractions to those who go there in search of money. Without the incentive of service village life would jar after the novelty has worn out. No young man having gone to a village may abandon the pursuit on the slightest contact with difficulty. Patient effort will show that villagers are not very different from city-dwellers and that they will respond to kindliness and attention. It is no doubt true that one does not have in the villages the opportunity of contact with the

great ones of the land. With the growth of village mentality the leaders will find it necessary to tour in the villages and establish a living touch with them. Moreover the companionship of the great and the good is available to all through the works of saints like Chaitanya, Ramakrishna, Tulsidas, Kabir, Nanak, Dadu, Tukaram, Tiruvalluvar, and others too numerous to mention though equally known and pious. The difficulty is to get the mind tuned to the reception of permanent values. If it is modern thought—political, social, economical, scientific—that is meant, it is possible to procure literature that will satisfy curiosity. I admit, however, that one does not find such as easily as one finds religious literature. Saints wrote and spoke for the masses. The vogue for translating modern thought to the masses in an acceptable manner has not yet quite set in. But it must come in time. I would, therefore, advise young men . . . not to give in but persist in their effort and by their presence make the villages more livable and lovable. That they will do by serving the villages in a manner acceptable to the villagers. Everyone can make a beginning by making the villages cleaner by their own labour and removing illiteracy to the extent of their ability. And if their lives are clean, methodical and industrious, there is no doubt that the infection will spread in the village in which they may be working.

Harijan, 20-2-1937

My Dream

I have not pictured a poverty-stricken India containing ignorant millions. I have pictured to myself an India continually progressing along the lines best suited to her genius. I do not, however, picture it as

a third class or even a first class copy of the dying civilization of the West.

If my dream is fulfilled, and every one of the seven lakhs of villages becomes a well-living republic in which there are no illiterates, in wnich no one is idle for want of work, in which everyone is usefully occupied and has nourishing food, well-ventilated dwellings, and sufficient Khadi for covering the body, and in which all the villagers know and observe the laws of hygiene and sanitation, such a State must have varied and increasing needs, which it must supply unless it would stagnate....

What, however, according to my view, the State will not have is an army of B.A.'s and M.A.'s with their brains sapped with too much cramming and minds almost paralysed by the impossible attempt to speak and write English like Englishmen. The majority of these have no work, no employment. And when they have the latter, it is usually clerkships at which most of the knowledge gained during their twelve years of High Schools and Colleges is of no use whatsoever to them.

Harijan, 30-7-1938

CHAPTER 2

PANCHAYATS IN PRE-INDEPENDENCE DAYS

Panchayat has an ancient flavour; it is a good word. It literally means an assembly of five elected by villagers. It represents the system, by which the innumerable village republics of India were governed. But the British Government, by its ruthlessly thorough method of revenue collection, almost destroyed these ancient republics, which could not stand the shock of this revenue collection. Congressmen are now making a crude attempt to revive the system by giving village elders civil and criminal jurisdiction. The attempt was first made in 1921. It failed. It is being made again, and it will fail if it is not systematically and decently, I will not say, scientifically, tried.

It was reported to me in Nainital, that in certain places in the U.P., even criminal cases like rape were tried by the so-called Panchayats. I heard of some fantastic judgments pronounced by ignorant or interested Panchayats. This is all bad if it is true. Irregular Panchayats are bound to fall to pieces under their own unsupportable weight. I suggest, therefore, the following rules for the guidance of village workers:

1. No Panchayat should be set up without the written sanction of a Provincial Congress Committee;

2. A Panchayat should in the first instance be elected by a public meeting called for the purpose by beat of drums;

3. It should be recommended by the Tahsil Committee;

4. Such Panchayat should have no criminal jurisdication;

5. It may try civil suits if the parties to them refer their disputes to the Panchayat;

6. No one should be compelled to refer any matter to the Panchayat;

7. No Panchayat should have any authority to impose fines, the only sanction behind its civil decrees being its moral authority, strict impartiality and the willing obedience of the parties concerned;

8. There should be no social or other boycott for the time being;

9. Every Panchayat will be expected to attend to:

(a) The education of boys and girls in its village;

(b) Its sanitation;

(c) Its medical needs;

(d) The upkeep and cleanliness of village wells or ponds;

(e) The uplift of and daily wants of the so-called untouchables.

10. A Panchayat that fails without just cause to attend to the requirements mentioned in clause 9 within six months of its election, or fails otherwise to retain the goodwill of the villagers, or stands self-condemned for any other cause, appearing sufficient to the Provincial Congress Committee, may be disbanded and another elected in its place.

The disability to impose fines or social boycott is a necessity of the case in the initial stages; social boycott in villages has been found to be a dangerous weapon in the hands of ignorant or unscrupulous men. Imposition of fines too may lead to mischief and defeat

the very end in view. Where a Panchayat is really popular and increases its popularity by the constructive work of the kind suggested in clause 9, it will find its judgments and authority respected by reason of its moral prestige. And that surely is the greatest sanction anyone can possess and of which one cannot be deprived.

Young India, 28-5-1931

CHAPTER 3

PANCHAYATS IN INDEPENDENT INDIA

Independence must mean that of the people of India, not of those who are today ruling over them. The rulers should depend on the will of those who are under their heels. Thus, they have to be servants of the people, ready to do their will.

Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus, every village will be a republic or Panchayat having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world. It will be trained and prepared to perish in the attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without. Thus, ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit. This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbours or from the world. It will be free and voluntary play of mutual forces. Such a society is necessarily highly cultured in which every man and woman knows what he or she wants and, what is more, knows that no one should want anything that others cannot have with equal labour.

This society must naturally be based on truth and non-violence which, in my opinion, are not possible without a living belief in God meaning a Self-existent, All-knowing Living Force which inheres every other force known to the world and which depends on none and which will live when all other forces may conceivably perish or cease to act. I am unable to account for my life without belief in this All-embracing Living Force.

In this structure composed of innumerable villages there will be ever-widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.

Therefore, the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but give strength to all within and derive its own from the centre. I may be taunted with the retort that this is all utopian and therefore not worth a single thought. If Euclid's point, though incapable of being drawn by human agency, has an imperishable value, my picture has its own for mankind to live. Let India live for this true picture, though never realizable in its completeness. We must have a proper picture of what we want before we can have something approaching it. If there ever is to be a republic of every village in India, then I claim verity for my picture in which the last is equal to the first, or in other words, none is to be the first and none the last.

In this picture every religion has its full and equal place. We are all leaves of a majestic tree whose trunk cannot be shaken off its roots which are deep down in the bowels of the earth. The mightiest of winds cannot move it.

In this there is no room for machines that would displace human labour and that would concentrate power in a few hands. Labour has its unique place in a cultural human family. Every machine that helps every individual has a place. But I must confess that I have never sat down to think out what that machine can be. I have thought of Singer's sewing machine. But even that is perfunctory. I do not need it to fill in my picture.

Harijan, 28-7-1946

When Panchayat Raj is established, public opinion will do what violence can never do. The present power of the zamindars, the capitalists and the rajas can hold sway so long as the common people do not realize their own strength. If the people non-co-operate with the evil of zamindari or capitalism, it must die of inanition. In Panchyat Raj only the Panchayat will be obeyed and the Panchayat can only work through the law of their making.

Harijan, 1-6-1947

CHAPTER 4

MY IDEA OF VILLAGE SWARAJ

My idea of Village Swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. Thus every village's first concern will be to grow its own food crops and cotton for its cloth. It should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and playground for adults and children. Then if there is more land available, it will grow *useful* money crops, thus excluding *ganja*, tobacco, opium and the like. The village will maintain a village theatre, school and public hall. It will have its own waterworks ensuring water supply. This can be done through controlled wells and tanks. Education will be compulsory up to the final basic course. As far as possible every activity will be conducted on the co-operative basis. There will be no castes such as we have today with their graded untouchability. Non-violence with its technique of Satyagraha and non-co-operation will be the sanction of the village community. There will be a compulsory service of village guards who will be selected by rotation from the register maintained by the village. The government of the village will be conducted by the Panchayat of five persons, annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. These will have all the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishments in the accepted sense, this Panchayat will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office.

Any village can become such a republic today without much interference, even from the present Government whose sole effective connection with the villages is the exaction of the village revenue. I have not examined here the question of relations with the neighbouring villages and the centre if any. My purpose is to present an outline of village government. Here there is perfect democracy based upon individual freedom. The individual is the architect of his own government. The law of non-violence rules him and his government. He and his village are able to defy the might of a world. For the law governing every villager is that he will suffer death in the defence of his and his village's honour.

There is nothing inherently impossible in the picture drawn here. To model such a village may be the work of a lifetime. Any lover of true democracy and village life can take up a village, treat it as his world and sole work, and he will find good results. He begins by being the village scavenger, spinner, watchman, medicine man and school-master all at once. If nobody comes near him, he will be satisfied with scavegning and spinning.

Harijan, 26-7-1942

CHAPTER 5

AN IDEAL VILLAGE

An ideal Indian village will be so constructed as to lend itself to perfect sanitation. It will have cattages with sufficient light and ventilation built of a material obtainable within a radius of five miles of it. The cottages will have courtyards enabling householders to plant vegetables for domestic use and to house their cattle. The village lanes and streets will be free of all avoidable dust. It will have wells according to its needs and accessible to all. It will have houses of worship for all, also a common meeting place, a village common for grazing its cattle, a co-operative dairy, primary and secondery schools in which industrial education will be the central fact, and it will have Panchayats for settling disputes. It will produce its own grains, vegetables and fruit, and its own Khadi. This is roughly my idea of a model village. In the present circumstances its cottages will remain what they are with slight improvements. Given a good zamindar, where there is one, or co-operation among the people, almost the whole of the programme other than model cottages can be worked out at an expenditure within means of the villagers including the zamindar or zamindars, without Government assistance. With that assistance there is no limit to the possibility of village reconstruction. But my task just now is to discover what the villagers can do to help themselves if they have mutual co-operation and contribute voluntary labour for the common good. I am convinced that they can, under intelligent guidance, double the village income as distinguished from

individual income. There are in our villages inexhaustible resources not for commercial purposes in every case but certainly for local purposes in almost every case. The greatest tragedy is the hopeless unwillingness of the villagers to better their lot.

The very first problem the village worker will solve is its sanitation. It is the most neglected of all the problems that baffle workers and that undermine physical wellbeing and breed disease. If the worker became a voluntary Bhangi, he would begin by collecting night-soil and turning it into manure and sweeping village streets. He will tell people how and where they should perform daily functions and speak to them on the value of sanitation and the great injury caused by its neglect. The worker will continue to do the work whether the villagers listen to him or no.

Harijan, 9-1-1937

CHAPTER 6
NON-VIOLENT RURAL ECONOMY

You cannot build non-violence on a factory civilization, but it can be built on self-contained villages. Rural economy as I have conceived it, eschews exploitation altogether, and exploitation is the essence of violence. You have, therefore, to be rural-minded before you can be non-violent, and to be rural-minded you have to have faith in the spinning wheel.

Harijan, 4-11-1939

Strictly speaking, no activity and no industry is possible without a certain amount of violence, no matter how little. Even the very process of living is impossible without a certain amount of violence. What we have to do is to minimize it to the greatest extent

possible. Indeed the very word non-violence, a negative word, means that it is an effort to abandon the violence that is inevitable in life. Therefore whoever believes in Ahimsa will engage himself in occupations that involve the least possible violence. .... This is not possible without a heart-belief in non-violence. Suppose there is a man who does no actual violence, who labours for his bread, but who is always consumed with envy at orher people's wealth or prosperity. He is not non-violent. A non-violent occupation is thus that occupation which is fundamentally free from violence and which involves no exploitation or envy of others.

Now I have no historical proof, but I believe that there was a time in India when village economics were organized on the basis of such non-violent occupations, not on the basis of the rights of man but on the duties of man. Those who engaged themselves in such occupations did earn their living, but their labour contributed to the good of the community. A carpenter, for instance, ministered to the needs of the village farmer. He got no cash payment but was paid in kind by the villagers. There could be injustice even in this system, but it would be reduced to a minimum. I speak from personal knowledge of life in Kathiawad of over sixty years ago. There was more lustre in people's eyes, and more life in their limbs, than you find today. It was a life founded on unconscious Ahimsa.

Body labour was at the core of these occupations and industries, and there was no large-scale machinery. For when a man is content to own only so much land as he can till with his own labour, he cannot exploit others. Handicrafts exclude exploitation and slavery. Large-scale machinery concentrates wealth in the hands of one man who lords it over the rest who

slave for him. For he may be trying to create ideal conditions for his workmen, but it is none the less exploitation which is a form of violence.

When I say that there was a time when society was based not on exploitation but on justice, I mean to suggest that truth and Ahimsa were not virtues confined to individuals but were practised by communities. To me virtue ceases to have any value if it is cloistered or possible only for individuals.

Harijan, 1-9-1940

CHAPTER 7
ALL-ROUND VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT

A village unit as conceived by me is as strong as the strongest. My imaginary village consists of 1,000 souls. Such a unit can give a good account of itself, if it is well organized on a basis of self-sufficiency.

Harijan, 4-8-1946

The villagers should develop such a high degree of skill that articles prepared by them should command a ready market outside. When our villages are fully developed there will be no dearth in them of men with a high degree of skill and artistic talent. There will be village poets, village artists, village architects, linguists and research workers. In short, there will be nothing in life worth having which will not be had in the villages. Today the villages are dung heaps. Tomorrow they will be like tiny gardens of Eden where dwell highly intelligent folk whom no one can deceive or exploit.

The reconstruction of the villages along these lines should begin right now. The reconstruction of rhe

villages should not be organized on a temporary but permanent basis.

Craft, art, health and education should all be integrated into one scheme. Nai Talim is a beautiful blend of all the four and covers the whole education of the individual from the time of conception to the moment of death. Therefore, I would not divide village uplift work into water-tight compartments from the very beginning but undertake an activity which will combine all four. Instead of regarding craft and industry as different from education I will regard the former as the medium for the latter. Nai Talim therefore ought to be integrated into the scheme.

Harijan, 10-11-1946

If rural reconstruction were not to include rural sanitation, our villages would remain the muck-heaps that they are today. Village sanitation is a vital part of village life and is as difficult as it is important. It needs a heroic effort to eradicate age-long insanitation. The village worker who is ignorant of the science of village sanitation, who is not a successful scavenger, cannot fit himself for village service.

It seems to be generally admitted that without the new or basic education the education of millions of children in India is well-nigh impossible. The village worker has, therefore, to master it and become a basic education teacher himself.

Adult education will follow in the wake of basic education as a matter of course. Where this new education has taken root, the children themselves become their parents' teachers. Be that as it may, the village worker has to undertake adult education also.

Woman is described as man's better half. As long as she has not the same rights in law as man, as long as the birth of a girl does not receive the same welcome as that of a boy, so long we should know that India is suffering from partial paralysis. Suppression of woman is a denial of Ahimsa. Every village worker will, therefore, regard every woman as his mother, sister or daughter as the case may be, and look upon her with respect. Only such a worker will command the confidence of the village people.

It is impossible for an unhealthy people to win Swaraj. Therefore we should no longer be guilty of the neglect of the health of our people. Every village worker must have a knowledge of the general principles of health.

Without a common language no nation can come into being. Instead of worrying himself with the controversy about Hindi-Hindustani and Urdu, the village worker will acquire a knowledge of the Rashtrabhasha which should be such as can be understood by both Hindus and Muslims.

Our infatuation for English has made us unfaithful to provincial languages. If only as penance for this unfaithfulness the village worker sould cultivate in the villagers a love of their own speech. He will have equal regard for all the other languages of India, and will learn the language of the part where he may be working, and thus be able to inspire the villagers there with a regard for their own speech.

The whole of this programme will, however, be a structure on sand if it is not built on the solid foundation of economic equality. Economic equality must never be supposed to mean possession of an equal amount of worldly goods by everyone. It does mean,

however, that everyone will have a proper house to live in, sufficient and balanced food to eat, and sufficient Khadi with which to cover himself. It also means that the cruel inequality that obtains today will be removed by purely non-violent means.

Harijan, 18-8-1940

CHAPTER 8

VILLAGE SANITATION

The things to attend to in the villages are cleaning tanks and wells and keeping them clean, getting rid of dung-heaps. If the workers will begin the work themselves, working like paid Bhangis from day to day and always letting the villagers know that they are expected to join them so as ultimately to do the whole work themselves, they may be sure that they will find that the villagers will soonea or later co-operate.

Lanes and streets have to be cleansed of all the rubbish, which should be classified. There are portions which can be turned into manure, portions which have simply to be buried and portions which can be directly turned into wealth. Every bone picked up is valuable raw material from which useful articles can be made or which can be crushed into rich manure. Rags and waste-paper can be turned into paper, and excreta picked up are golden manure for the village fields. The way to treat the excreta is to mix them, liquid as well as solid, with superficial earth in soil dug no deeper than one foot at the most. In his book on rural hygiene, Dr. Poore says that excreta should be buried in earth no deeper than nine to twelve inches (I am quoting from memory). The author contends that superficial earth is charged with minute life, which, together

with light and air which easily penetrate it, turn the excreta into good soft sweet-smelling soil within a week. Any villager can test this for himself. The way to do it is either to have fixed latrines, with earthen or iron buckets, and empty the contents in properly prepared places from day to day, or to perform the function directly on to the ground dug up in squares, The excreta can either be buried in a village common or in individual fields. This can only be done by the co-operation of the villagers. At the worst, an enterprising villager can collect the excreta and turn them into wealth for himself. At present, this rich manure, valued at lakhs of rupees, runs to waste every day, fouls the air and brings disease into the bargain.

Village tanks are promiscuously used for bathing, washing clothes, and drinking and cooking purposes. Many village tanks are also used by cattle. Buffaloes are often to be seen wallowing in them. The wonder is that, in spite of this sinful misuse of village tanks, villages have not been destroyed by epidemics. It is the universal medical evidence that this neglect to ensure purity of the water supply of villages is responsible for many of the diseases suffered by the villagers.

This, it will be admitted, is a gloriously interesting and instructive service, fraught with incalculable benefit to the suffering humanity of India. I hope it is clear from my discription of the way in which the problem sould be tackled, that, given willing workers who will wield the broom and the shovel with the same ease and pride as the pen and the pencil, the question of expense is almost wholly eliminated. All the outlay that will be required is confined to a broom, a basket, a shovel and pick-axe, and possibly some disinfectant. Dry ashes are, perhaps, as effective a dis-

infectant as any that a chemist can supply. But here let philanthropic chemists tell us what is the most effective and cheap village disinfectant that villagers can improvise in their villages.

Harijan, 8-2-1935

CHAPTER 9

RURAL MEDICAL RELIEF

Medical relief as part of village work or social service plays an important part in many reports I receive from numerous organizations. This relief consists of medicines supplied to patients who from far and near flock to any person who advertises himself as distributor of such relief. It means no trouble on the part of the medicine man. He need not have much or any knowledge of diseases and the symptoms. Medicines he often receives free from obliging chemists. Donations are always to be had from indiscriminate donors whose conscience is satisfied if they can distribute their charity in aid of suffering humanity.

This social service has appeared to me to be the laziest form of service and often even mischievous. It works mischief when the patient is expected to do nothing save to swallow the drug given to him. He is none the wiser for having received the medicine. If anything he is worse off than before. The knowledge that he can get for nothing or for a trifle a pill or a potion that will correct certain irregularities will tempt him to repeat them. The fact that he gets such aid free of charge will undermine his self-respect which should disdain to receive anything for nothing.

There is another type of medical relief which is a boon. It is given by those who know the nature of

diseases, who will tell the patients why they have their particular complaints and will also tell them how to avoid them. Such servants will rush to assist at all odd hours of the day or night. Such discriminating relief is an education in hygiene, teaching the people how to observe cleanliness and to gain health. But such service is rare. In the majority of cases mention of medical relief in reports is a piece of advertisement leading to donations for other activities requiring perhaps as little exertion or knowledge as medical relief. I would therefore urge all workers in the social field, whether urban or rural, to treat their medical activity as the least important item of service. It would be better to avoid all mention of such relief. Workers would do well to adopt measures that would prevent disease in their localities. Their stock of medicines should be as small as possible. They should study the bazar medicines available in their villages, know their reputed properties, and use them as far as possible.

Harijan, 9-11-1935

I hold that where the rules of personal, domestic and public sanitation are strictly observed and due care is taken in the matter of diet and exercise, there should be no occasion for illness or disease. Where there is absolute purity, inner and outer, illness becomes impossible. If the village people could but understand this, they would not need doctors, *hakims* or *vaidyas*.

Harijan, 26-5-1946

Nature Cure

Nature cure implies that the treatment should be the cheapest and the simplest possible. The ideal is that such treatment should be carried out in the villages. The villagers should be able to provide the

necessary means and equipment. What cannot be had in the villages should be procured. Nature cure does mean a change for the better in one's outlook on life itself. It means regulation of one's life in accordance with the laws of health. It is not a matter of taking the free medicine from the hospital or for fees. A man who takes free treatment from the hospital accepts charity. The man who accepts nature cure never begs. Self-help enhances self-respect. He takes steps to cure himself by eliminating poisons from the system and takes precautions against falling ill in the future.

Right diet and balanced diet are necessary. Today our villages are as bankrupt as we are ourselves. To produce enough vegetables, fruits and milk in the villages is an essential part of the nature cure scheme. Time spent on this should not be considered a waste. It is bound to benefit all the villagers and ultimately the whole of India.

Harijan, 2-6-1946

CHAPTER 10

REVIVAL OF VILLAGE INDUSTRIES

We are guilty of a grievous wrong against the villagers, and the only way in which we can expiate it is by encouraging them to revive their lost industries and arts by assuring them of a ready market. There is no one more patient and forbearing than God, but there comes a limit even to His patience and forbearance. If we neglect our duty to our villages, we shall be courting our own ruin. This duty is no onerous one. It is incredibly simple. We have to be rural-minded and think of our necessities and the necessities of our household in the terms of rural-mindedness. The

task does not involve much expenditure either. Volunteers are needed to go to the nearest villages to assure them that all that they produce would find a ready market in the towns and cities. This is a task which can be undertaken by men and women of all castes and creeds, of all parties and all faiths. It is in consonance with the true economics of our country.

Harijan, 1-3-1935

There is hardly anything of daily use in the home which the villagers have not made before and cannot make even now. If we perform the mental trick and fix our gaze upon them, we immediately put millions of rupees into the pockets of the villagers, whereas at the present moment we are exploiting the villagers without making any return worth the name. It is time we arrested the progress of the tragedy. To me, the campaign against untouchability has begun to imply ever so much more than the eradication of the ceremonial untouchability of those who are labelled untouchables. For the city dweller, the villages have become untouchable. He does not know them, he will not live in them, and if he finds himself in a village, he will want to reproduce the city life there. This would be tolerable, if we could bring into being cities which would accommodate 30 crores of human beings. This is much more impossible than the one of reviving the village industries and stopping the progressive poverty, which is due as much to enforced unemployment as to any other cause.

Harijan, 30–11–1934

The revival of the village is possible only when it is no more exploited. Industrialization on a mass scale will necessarily lead to passive or active exploitation of the

villagers as the problems of competition and marketing come in. Therefore we have to concentrate on the village being self-contained, manufacturing mainly for use. Provided this character of the village industry is maintained, there would be no objection to villagers using even the modern machines and tools that they can make and can afford to use. Only they should not be used as a means of exploitation of others.

Harijan, 29-8-1936

CHAPTER 11
CHARKHA IN THE VILLAGES

The spinning wheel represents to me the hope of the masses. The masses lost their freedom, such as it was, with the loss of the Charkha. The Charkha supplemented the agriculture of the villagers and gave it dignity. It was the friend and solace of the widow. It kept the villagers from idleness. For the Charkha included all the anterior and posterior industries — ginning, carding, warping, sizing, dyeing and weaving. These in their turn kept the village carpenter and the blacksmith busy. The Charkha enabled the seven hundred thousand villages to become self-contained. With the exit of the Charkha went the other village industries, such as the oil press. Nothing took the place of these industries. Therefore the villages were drained of their varied occupations and their creative talent and what little wealth these brought them.

Hence, if the villagers are to come into their own, the most natural thing that suggests itself is the revival of the Charkha and all it means.

This revival cannot take place without an army of selfless Indians of intelligence and patriotism working with a single mind in the villages to spread the message of the Charkha and bring a ray of hope and light into their lustreless eyes. This is a mighty effort at co-operation and adult education of the correct type. It brings about a silent and sure revolution like the silent but sure and life-giving revolution of the Charkha.

Twenty years' experience of Charkha work has convinced me of the correctness of the argument here advanced by me. The Charkha has served the poor Muslims and Hindus in almost an equal measure. Nearly five crores of rupees have been put into the pockets of these lakhs of village artisans without fuss and tomtoming.

Hence I say without hesitation that the Charkha must lead us to Swaraj in terms of the masses belonging to all faiths. The Charkha restores the villages to their rightful place and abolishes distinctions between high and low.

Harijan, 13-4-1940

The ideal no doubt is for every village to spin and weave for itself just as today most villages grow corn for themselves. It is easier for every village to spin and weave for itself than to grow all its corn. Every village can stock enough cotton and spin and weave without any difficulty.

Young India, 11-8-1921

CHAPTER 12

OTHER VILLAGE INDUSTRIES

These (village industries other than Khadi) stand on a different footing from Khadi. There is not much scope for voluntary labour in them. Each industry will take the labour of only a certain number of hands. These industries come in as a handmaid to Khadi. They cannot exist without Khadi, and Khadi will be robbed of its dignity without them. Village economy cannot be complete without the essential village industries such as hand-grinding, hand-pounding, soap-making, paper-making, match-making, tanning, oil-pressing, etc. Congressmen can interest themselves in these and, if they are villagers or will settle down in villages, they will give these industries a new life and a new dress. All should make it a point of honour to use only village articles whenever and wherever available. Given the demand there is no doubt that most of our wants can be supplied from our villages. When we have become village-minded, we will not want imitations of the West or machine-made products, but we will develop a true national taste in keeping with the vision of a new India in which pauperism, starvation and idleness will be unknown.

Constructive Programme, pp. 15-16, Edn. 1948

Village Tanning

Village tanning is as ancient as India itself. No one can say when tanning became a degraded calling. It could not have been so in ancient times. But we know today that one of the most useful and indispensable

industries has consigned probably a million people to hereditary untouchability. An evil day dawned upon this unhappy country when labour began to be despised and therefore neglected. Millions of those who were the salt of the earth, on whose industry this country depended for its very existence, came to be regarded as low classes, and the microscopic leisured few became the privileged classes, with the tragic result that India suffered morally and materially. Which was the greater of the two losses it is difficult, if not impossible, to estimate. But the criminal neglect of the peasants and artisans has reduced us to pauperism, dullness and habitual idleness. With her magnificent climate, lofty mountains, mighty rivers and an extensive seaboard, India has limitless resources, whose full exploitation in her villages should have prevented poverty and disease. But divorce of the intellect from body-labour has made of us perhaps the shortest-lived, most resourceless and most exploited nation on earth. The state of village tanning is, perhaps, the best proof of my indictment.

It is estimated that rupees nine crores worth of raw hide is annually exported from India and that much of it is returned to her in the shape of manufactured articles. This means not only a material, but also an intellectual, drain. We miss the training we should receive in tanning and preparing the innumerable articles of leather we need for daily use.

Here is work for the cent per cent Swadeshi lover and scope for the harnessing of technical skill of the solution of a great problem. It serves the Harijans, it serves the villagers, and it means honourable employment for the middle class intelligentsia who are in search of employment. Add to this the fact that the

intelligentsia have a proper opportunity of coming in direct touch with the villagers.

Harijan,7-9-1934

Compost Manure

The excreta of animals and human beings mixed with refuse can be turned into golden manure, itself a valuable commodity. It increased the productivity of the soil which received it. Preparation of this manure was itself a village industry. But this, like all village industries, could not give tangible results unless the crores of India co-operated in reviving them and thus making India prosperous.

Delhi Diary, pp. 270-71

Given the willing co-operation of the masses of India, this country cannot only drive out shortage of food, but can provide India with more than enough. This organic manure ever enriches, never impoverishes the soil. The daily waste, judiciously composted, returns to the soil in the form of golden manure causing a saving of millions of rupees and increasing manifold, the total yield of grains and pulses. In addition, the judicious use of waste keeps the surroundings clean. And cleanliness is not only next to godliness, it promotes health.

Harijan, 28-12-1947.

CHAPTER 13

DUTY OF CONGRESS MINISTRIES

It is legitimate to ask what Congress Ministers will do for Khaddar and other village industries now that they are in office. Whether a Minister is separately appointed or not, a department for the work is surely necessary. In these times of scarcity of food and clothing, this department can render the greatest help. The Ministers have experts at their disposal through the A-I.S.A. and the A-I.V.I.A. It is possible to clothe today the whole of India in Khadi on the smallest outlay and in the shortest time possible. Each Provincial Government has to tell the villagers that they must manufacture their own Khaddar for their own use. This brings in automatic local production and distribution. And there will undoubtedly be a surplus for the cities at least to a certain extent which, in its turn, will reduce the pressure on the local mills. The latter will then be able to take part in supplying the want of cloth in other parts of the world.

How can this result be brought about?

The Government should notify the villagers that they will be expected to manufacture Khaddar for the needs of their villages within a fixed date after which no cloth will be supplied to them. The Government in their turn will supply the villagers with cotton seed or cotton whenever required, at cost price and the tools of manufacture also at cost, to be recovered in easy instalments payable in, say, five years or more. They will supply them with instructors wherever necessary

and undertake to buy surplus stock of Khaddar, provided that the villagers in question have their cloth requirements supplied from their own manufacture. This should do away with cloth shortage without fuss and with very little overhead charges.

The villages will be surveyed and a list prepared of things that can be manufactured locally with little or no help and which may be required for village use or for sale outside, such, for instance, as *ghani*-pressed oil and cakes, burning oil prepared through *ghanis*, hand-pounded rice, *tadgud*, honey, toys, mats, hand-made paper, village soap, etc. If enough care is thus taken the villages, most of them as good as dead or dying, will hum with life and exhibit the immense possibilities they have of supplying most of their wants themselves and of the cities and towns of India.

Then there is the limitless cattle wealth of India suffering from criminal neglect. Goseva Sangh, as yet not properly experienced, can still supply valuable aid.

Without the basic training the villagers are being starved for education. This desideratum can be supplied by the Hindustani Talimi Sangh.

Harijan, 28-4-1946

CHAPTER 14

CO-OPERATIVE CATTLE FARMING

It is quite impossible for an individual farmer to look after the welfare of his cattle in his own home in a proper and scientific manner. Amongst other causes lack of collective effort has been a principal cause of the deterioration of the cow and hence of cattle in general.

The world today is moving towards the ideal of collective or co-operative effort in every department of life. Much in this line has been and is being accomplished. It has come into our country also, but in such a distorted from that our poor have not been able to reap its benefits. *Pari passu* with the increase in our population land holdings of the average farmer are daily decreasing. Moreover, what the individual possesses is often fragmentary. For such farmers to keep cattle in their home is a suicidal policy; and yet this is their condition today. Those who give the first place to economics and pay scant attention to religious, ethical or humanitarian considerations proclaim from the house-tops that the farmer is being devoured by his cattle due to the cost of their feed which is out of all proportion to what they yield. They say it is folly not to slaughter wholesale all useless animals.

What then should be done by humanitarians is the question. The answer obviously is to find a way whereby we may not only save the lives of our cattle but also see that they do not become a burden. I am sure that co-operative effort can help us in a large

measure. The following comparison may be helpful:

(1) Under the collective system no farmer can keep cattle in his house as he does today. They foul the air, and dirty the surroundings. There is neither intelligence nor humanitarianism in living with animal. Man was not meant to do so. The space taken up by the cattle today would be spared to the farmer and his family, if the collective system were adopted.

(2) As the number of cattle increases, life becomes impossible to the farmer in his home. Hence he is obliged to sell the calves and kill the male buffaloes or else turn them out to starve and die. This inhumanity would be averted if the care of the cattle were undertaken on a co-operative basis.

(3) Collective cattle farming would ensure the supply of veterinary treatment to animals when they are ill. No ordinary farmer can afford this on his own.

(4) Similarly one selected bull can be easily kept for the need of several cows under the collective system. This is impossible otherwise except for charity.

(5) Common grazing ground or land for exercising the animals will be easily available under the co-operative system, whereas today generally there is nothing of the kind for individual farmers.

(6) The expense on fodder will be comparatively far less under the collective system.

(7) The sale of milk at good prices will be greatly facilitated and there will be no need or temptation for the farmer to adulterate it as he does as an individual.

(8) It is impossible to carry out tests of the fitness of every head of cattle individually, but this could easily be done for the cattle of a whole village and would thus make it easier to improve the breed.

(9) The foregoing advantages should be sufficient argument in favour of co-operative cattle farmings. The strongest argument in its favour is that the individualistic system has been the means of making our own condition as well as that of our cattle pitiable. We can only save ourselves and them by making this essential change.

I firmly believe too that we shall not derive the full benefits of agriculture until we take to co-operative farming. Does it not stand to reason that it is far better for a hundred families in village to cultivate their lands collectively and divide the income therefrom than to divide the land anyhow into a hundred portions? And what applies to land applies equally to cattle.

It is quite another matter that it may be difficult to convert people to adopt this way of life straight away. The straight and narrow road is always hard to traverse. Every step in the programme of cow service is strewn with thorny problems. But only by surmounting difficulties can we hope to make the path easier. My purpose for the time being is to show the great superiority of collective cattle farming over the individual effort. I hold further that the latter is wrong and the former only is right. In reality even the individual can only safeguard his independence through co-operation. In cattle farming the individual effort has led to selfishness and inhumanity, whereas the collective effort can abate both the evils, if it does not remove them altogether.

Harijan, 15–2–1942

CHAPTER 15

VILLAGE EXHIBITIONS

If we want and believe that the village should not only survive but also become strong and flourishing, then the village perspective is the only correct viewpoint. If this is true then in our exhibitions there can be no place for the glamour and pomp of the cities. There should be no necessity for games and other entertainments that belong to the cities. An exhibition should not become a Tamasha, nor a source of income; it should never become the advertising medium for traders. No sales should be allowed there. Even Khadi and village industry products should not be sold. An exhibition should be a medium of education, should be attractive and it should be such as to infuse in the villager the impulse to take to some industry or the other. It should bring out the glaring defects and drawbacks in the present day village life, and show methods to be adopted to set them right. It should also be able to indicate the extent of achievement in that direction ever since the idea of village uplift was sponsored. It should also teach how to make village life artistic.

Now let us see what an exhibition will be like if it is to conform to the above conditions.

1. There should be two models of villages—one as is existing today and the other an improved one. The improved village will be clean all throughout. Its houses, its roads, its surroundings and its fields will be all clean. The condition of the cattle should also improve. Books, charts and pictures should be used to show what industries give increased income and how.

2. It must show how to conduct the various village industries, wherefrom to obtain the needed instruments, how to make them. The actual working of each industry should be demonstrated. Along with these the following should also find place:

(a) Ideal village diet.

(b) Comparison between village industry and machine industry.

(c) Model lessons for rearing animals.

(d) Art section.

(e) Model of village latrine.

(f) Farm-yard manure *v.* chemical manure.

(g) Utilization of hides, bones, etc. of animals.

(h) Village music, musical instruments, village dramas.

(i) Village games, village *akhadas* and forms of exercise.

(j) Nai Talim.

(k) Village medicine.

(l) Village maternity home.

Subject to the policy indicated in the beginning, this list may be further expanded. What I have indicated is by way of example only; it should not be taken to be exhaustive. I have not made any mention of the Charkha and other village industries as they are taken for granted. Without them the exhibition will be absolutely useless.

Gram Udyog Patrika, July 1946

CHAPTER 16

LOK SEVAK SANGH

[On 29th January, 1948, a day before he passed away, Gandhiji had drafted a constitution for the Lok Sevak Sangh, or association of servants of the people, into which he wanted the Indian National Congress to dissolve itself, and he drew up the following among qualifications for those who would be its members:]

1. Every worker shall be a habitual wearer of Khadi made from self-spun yarn or certified by the A-I.S.A. and must be a teetotaller. If a Hindu, he must have abjured untouchability in any shape or form in his own person or in his family, and must be a believer in the ideal of inter-communal unity, equal respect and regard for all religions, and equality of opportunity and status for all irrespective of race, creed or sex.

2. He shall come in personal contact with every villager within his jurisdiction.

3. He shall enrol and train workers from amongst the villagers and keep a register of all these.

4. He shall keep a record of his work from day to day.

5. He shall organize the villages so as to make them self-contained and self-supporting through their agriculture and handicrafts.

6. He shall educate the village folk in sanitation and hygiene and take all measures for prevention of ill health and disease among them.

7. He shall organize the education of the village folk from birth to death along the lines of Nai Talim, in acordance with the policy laid down by the Hindustani Talimi Sangh.

Harijan, 15-2-1948

CHAPTER 17

SAMAGRA GRAMASEVA

A Samagra Gramasevak must know everybody living in the village and render them such service as he can. That does not mean that the worker will be able to do everything single-handed. He will show them the way of helping themselves and procure for them such help and materials as they require. He will train up his own helpers. He will so win over the villagers that they will seek and follow his advice. Supposing I go and settle down in a village with a *ghani*, I won't be an ordinary *ghanchi** earning 15-20 rupees a month. I will be a Mahatma *ghanchi*. I have used the word 'Mahatma' in fun, but what I mean to say is that as a *ghanchi* I will become a model for the villagers to follow. I will be a *ghanchi* who knows the Gita and the Quran. I will be learned enough to teach their children. I may not be able to do so for lack of time. The villagers will come to me and ask me: "Please make arrangements for our children's education." I will tell them: "I can find you a teacher, but you will have to bear the expenses." And they will be prepared to do so most willingly. I will teach them spinning and when they come and ask me for the services of a weaver, I will find them a weaver on the same terms as I found them a teacher. And the weaver will teach them how to weave their own cloth. I will inculcate in them the importance of hygiene and sanitation and when they come and ask for a sweeper I will tell them: "I

* Gujarati word meaning an oil man.

will be your sweeper and I will train you all in the job." This is my conception of Samagra Gramaseva.

Harijan, 17–3–1946

Village Factions

Alas for India that parties and factions are to be found in the villages as they are to be found in our cities. And when power politics enter over village with less thought of the welfare of the villages and more of using them for increasing the parties' own power, this becomes a hindrance to the progress of the villages rather than a help. I would say that whatever be the consequence, we must make use as much as possible of local help and if we are free from the taint of power politics, we are not likely to go wrong. Let us remember that the English-educated men and women from the cities have criminally neglected the villages of India which are the backbone of the country. The process of remembering our neglect will induce patience. I have never gone to a single village which is devoid of an honest worker. We fail to find him when we are not humble enough to recognize any merit in our villages. Of course, we are to steer clear of local politics and this we shall learn to do when we accept help from all parties and no parties, wherever it is really good. . . . I categorically say to the principal worker: 'If you have any outside help, get rid of it. Work singly, courageously, intelligently with all the local help you can get and, if you do not succeed, blame only yourself and no one else and nothing else.'

Harijan, 2–3–1947

CHAPTER 18

SHANTI DALS IN VILLAGES

Some time ago an attempt was made, at my instance, to form *shanti dals* but nothing came of it. This lesson, however, was learnt that the membership, in its very nature, of such organizations could not be large. Ordinarily, the efficient running of a large volunteer corps based on force implies the possibility of the use of force in the event of breach of discipline. In such bodies little or no stress is laid on a man's character. Physique is the chief factor. The contrary must obtain in non-violent bodies in which character or soul force must mean everything and physique must take second place. It is difficult to find many such persons. That is why non-violent corps must be small, if they are to be efficient. Such brigades may be scattered all over; there may be one each for a village or a *mohalla*. The members must know one another well. Each corps will select its own head. All the members will have the same status, but where everyone is doing the same work there must be one person under whose discipline all must come, or else the work will suffer. Where there are two or more brigades the leaders must consult among themselves and decide on a common line of action. In that way alone lies success.

If non-violent volunteer corps are formed on the above lines, they can easily stop trouble. These corps will not require all the physical training given in *akhadas*, but a certain part of it will be necessary.

One thing, however, should be common to menbers of all such organizations and that is implicit faith in God. He is the only companion and doer. Without faith in Him these Peace Brigades will be lifeless. By

whatever name one calls God, one must realize that one can only work through His strength. Such a man will never take another's life. He will allow himself, if need be, to be killed and thereby live through his victory over death.

The mind of the man in whose life the realization of this law has become a living reality will not be bewildered in crisis. He will instinctively know the right way to act.

In spite, however, of what I have said above, I would like to give some rules culled from my own experience.

1. A volunteer may not carry any weapons.

2. The members of a corps must be easily recognizable.

3. Every volunteer must carry bandages, scissors, needle and thread, surgical knife, etc. for rendering first aid.

4. He should know how to carry and remove the wounded.

5. He should know how to put out fires, how to enter a fire area without getting burnt, how to climb heights for rescue work and descend safely with or without his charge.

6. He should be well acquainted with all the residents of his locality. This is a service in itself.

7. He should recite *Ramnama* ceaselessly in his heart and persuade others who believe to do likewise.

Man often repeats the name of God parrot-wise and expects fruit from so doing. The true seeker must have that living faith which will not only dispel the untruth of parrot-wise repetition from within him but also from the hearts of others.

Harijan, 5-5-1946

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